critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Opening This Week

Seventeen-Broadhurst, 5/21/51. Milton Berle, Sammy Lambert and Bernie Foyer present musical version of Booth Tarkington novel, adapted by Sally Benson. Score by Walter Kent, staged by Hassard Short and Richard Whorf. Lyrics by Kim Gannon. Cast features Ann Crowley, Kenneth Nelson and Frank Albertson.

Digests of Current Reviews

Courtin' Time-National, 6/13/51. Pleasant players but weak book is how majority of daily reviewers rated Russo, Ellis and Cohen musical adaptation of Eden Phillpotts' The Farmer's Wife by William Roos. Joe E. Brown, Billie Worth and Carmen Mathews won top honors. Atkinson, Times, and Coleman, Mirror, were amazed that so many well known people could turn out such a dull enterprise. While majority classed it as mildly amusing summer entertainment. Rice, Post, and Pollock, Compass, filed "so-so" votes. First felt that talented cast which tried so hard should win. Second wished script was as funny or as meaningful as it was speedy. Several noted that Carmen Mathews' song stopped the show cold. Peter Conlow and Gloria Patrice were billed as talented newcomers. Ralph Alswang's Down East sets and Alfred Drake's smooth direction were complimented Jack Lawrence and Don Walker's score was termed pleasant but not outstanding. While most liked George Balanchine's dance numbers, Atkinson didn't think it had any relation to anything. Coleman observed enthusiastic audience.

Affairs of State-Music Box, 9/25/50. June Havoc's replacement of Celeste Holm in leading role of Louis Verneuil's first English play drew compliments of three daily critics. It's now the best acted and best written straight comedy in town, raves Garland, Journal American. Critic feared that Holm had allowed her success to go to her acting; hurting her performance as a result. Now the play is back at its top level. Sheaffer, Eagle, who panned opening performance of play, still finds the script an unabashed utilization of sure fire material. But he underestimated the author's effective ability to write "audience shows". The new star is a smooth, cutie pie who fits in brightly and snugly. Morehouse, WT&S, found her delightful, gay and alive in role.

Stalag 17-48th St. Theatre, 5/8/51. Mild "con" review filed by Shipley, New Leader, on Donald Bevan and Edmund Trzcinski's comedy drama of life in a German prison camp. It is a play worth pondering, but emotionally it is likely to leave the audience little stirred. The effort to make the play rich with both the intensity and the absurdity of the prisoners was more than the authors could carry through.

Editorial Pros & Cons

Trade papers and TV critics panned ABC-TV Showtime USA from the very first program. The ANTA-supervised show was attacked for neither encouraging play going as a regular habit, nor for promoting the country's thousands of little theatre groups. Many sound ideas were presented in these constructive criticisms. If the program returns to the air in the fall, incorporation of these suggestions would make for a much better TV show. Every one would benefit from a TV program designed to foster ANTA's aims.

News & Notes

Liberty and Park South Ticket agencies being investigated by License Commission on complaint of anonymous ticket broker. Gloria Swanson honored by Lotos Club.

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' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

1. NY Times
2. NY Herald Tribune
3. NY News
4. NY Mirror
5. NY Compass
6. NY Post
7. NY Journal American
8. World Telegram & Sun
9. Brooklyn Eagle
10. Newark News
11. Women's Wear Daily
12. Wall Street Journal
13. Journal of Commerce
14. George Jean Nathan
15. Ward Morehouse
16. Morning Telegraph
17. Variety
18. Billboard
19. Theatre Arts
20. New Leader
21. Freeman
22. Commonweal
23. Cue
24. Chr. Science Monitor
25. Sat. Review Lit.
26. Newsweek
27. Time
28. Nation
29. New Republic
30. New Yorker

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "Pro."

AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50.	- Con: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29. None: 16-21-23-28.
CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50.	- Con: 18-19-28-29. So-So: 3. None: 16-21.
DARKNESS AT NOON-1/13/51.	- Con: 1-14-17-19-22-24-26-29. None: 25-28. So-So: 5-12-13-23.
GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-12/8/50.	- Con: 6-28. So-So: 14-18-22-23-27. None: 21-25.
GRAMERCY GHOST-4/23/51.	- Con: 1-2-4-5-6-10-11-14-17-22-25-26-27-30. None: 13-15-16-19-20-21-23-24-28-29.
GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50.	- Con: 28.
THE HAPPY TIME-1/24/50.	- Con: 5-6-15-19-26-27-28-30. None: 10-21.
THE KING AND I-3/29/51.	- Con: 28. None: 19-21.
KISS ME KATE-12/31/48.	- Con: 29. None: 21-28.
MAKE A WISH-4/18/51.	- Con: 1-5-6-14-23-24-27-28-29-30. None: 19-21-25.
THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51.	- Con: 14-19. None: 21-25-28.
OKLAHOMA-5/29/51.	- None: 12-13-14-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30.
THE ROSE TATTOO-2/3/51.	- Con: 4-6-7-14-19-21-24-25-27. None: 12-20-22.
SEASON IN THE SUN-9/28/50.	- Con: 9-11-20-24-28. So-So: 10. None: 7-13-15-16-21.
SOUTH PACIFIC-4/8/49.	- Con: 27. None: 5-9-10-12-14-20-21-28-29.
STALAG 17-5/8/51.	- Con: 4-20-23-28-30. So-So: 3. None: 19-21.
A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN-4/19/51.	- Con: 2-7-14-18-20-25-27-28. None: 15-19-21.
TWENTIETH CENTURY-12/24/50.	- Con: 5-21-24-28. None: 4-14-15-16.

' TV & Radio Notes '

ABC-TV Pulitzer Prize Playhouse and ABC-TV Showtime USA have not been renewed by sponsors...Jose Ferrer has obtained TV rights to Horatio Alger stories in which he plans to star Wally Cox...Sarah Churchill and Anthony Beauchamps will do Mr. & Mrs. show when Gramercy Ghost closes...Binnie Barnes may do a thrice daily ABC radio show... Irv Kupcinet, Chicago Sun Times, and wife featured on WBKB-TV interview show on alternate Fridays...Jack Eigen broadcasts nightly from Hutton's on WMGM from 12 midnight to 3:00 AM...ASCAP president Otto Harbach predicts musicals will be written especially for TV...WNYC broadcasting "BBC World Theatre" plays on Tuesdays at 10:00 PM.

' Green Room Department '

ANTA PANNINGS...George Jean Nathan continues to list reasons why ANTA is failing to live up to its objectives. The recent play series drained investment money from Broadway producers, it provided only short term work for actors, it received unfair concessions from the union. In addition ANTA distorted unfavorable reviews of its Danish Hamlet presentation, so much that a Danish paper has protested... ANTA series shows dearth of American playwrights, notes Crisler, Christian Science Monitor...Sylvester, News, points out that ANTA did not receive any union concessions.

COLUMN TIPS...Three drama critics who recently inherited money include Gibbs, New Yorker, Watts, Post and George Jean Nathan, reveals Sobol...Broadway producers assembling sets and costumes in England to cut costs, says Walker...Agents receiving applications for acting jobs from college drama professors, reports Kilgallen.

ACTORS AND JOBS...Best place to look for cast of new show is the State Unemployment Bureau suggests Watt, News. Number of well known performers there daily would make good showing against Sardi's luncheon crowd.

WHAT HAPPENED...Season in the Sun press release claiming that producer is buying white sand from Fire Island for his play, troubles Herald Tribune drama department. They printed this same item some months ago. Maybe the actors are taking the sand offstage in their shoes?

CUE'S TERM REPORT...Quitting the Broadway scene for the summer, Gabriel, Cue, lists his favorites. The Country Girl, The Lady's Not for Burning, Bell, Book and Candle, An Enemy of the People, The Rose Tattoo, Billy Budd, The Autumn Garden, Stalag 17, Guys and Dolls, The King and I, and A Tree Grows in Brooklyn. John Keating will cover the Broadway activities in the summer for the magazine.

CRITICAL WAR CEASES...For the second season in a row the general assault by producers, authors, and actors against the critics has been quiet, finds Hobe, Variety, in his season end report. In addition Gibbs, New Yorker, received an unusually friendly set of notices from his fellow critics for Season in the Sun. The season which was primarily one for the actors, was hardly impressive. A disappointing development was seeming eclipse of Committee of Theatrical Producers.

BROADWAY NEEDS...Theatre needs money willing to back something better than escapist entertainment, comments Coleman, Mirror. Answer may be in Roger Stevens' joining Playwrights Company. Stevens heads syndicate that bought Empire State Building.

FORWARD GLANCE...Next season promises many exciting prospects, Burr, Playbill, notes just skimming the list. If half of the promised items open, it will be the finest season of the past decade. Musicals include Having Wonderful Time, Music in the Air, Huck and Jim, Let Me Hear the Melody.

' Theatre News Round Up '

Council of Living Theatre gave $25,000 to subscription series plan to aid tours of plays...Show of the Month Club reports membership of 19,102...George M. Cohan, Jr. to lecture throughout the country to prospective ticket buyers to Jose Ferrer's Musical Comedy Man...Axel Norman elected president of International Theatre Institute...Group of Irish university students will tour U.S. this summer...Judges for ANTA Playwright Project are George Freedley, Florida Friebus and Myron Galewski.

' Interview Hi-Lights '

MAUREEN STAPLETON...The Rose Tattoo lead hasn't been changed by success, Rice, Post, reports. She is waiting to see who offers her the next part. Of one thing she is convinced. No one thing brings you success. It's everything everybody teaches you. It's the person who gives you encouragement, the man who gives you a job. Mostly it's the talent for hanging on. Rice predicts that the young actress will develop into a "character", because she shares with Tallulah Bankhead a frankness of saying whatever is on her mind in colorful language.

E.Y.HARBURG...Flahooley author stated on WNBC Hi Jinx that the musical writer today has a more difficult time getting started than he did in the 1920s. While today the producer demands one author turn out an entire production, in the '20s a young writer could sell a skit or song to a producers planning a revue. This acted as a training ground for many of our top writers.

JOE E.BROWN...Courtin' Time star is happy about the new musical, his first on Broadway in 25 years, he told Hawkins, WT&S. Not only does he have the same suite at the hotel that he had during Harvey. This time he intends to take color pictures in Central Park of all the seasons while he is in town. The only thing that is worrying him is just when he will have time to breathe during the first act "trouble" number.

EILEEN TIGHE...Theatre Arts new editor's first task is to put the 34 year old theatre magazine in the black, she explained to MBS Sardis. The history of theatre magazines have been one of subsidy, but she thinks the theatre should be able to support one magazine. By widening its base of interest she hopes to increase its circulation. The June issue, now on the stands, is the first under her editorship. The new editor also noted the trend in the magazine field to get books on the stands nearer their actual cover date.

' NY Critics In London '

Two footloose American critics agree that N.C.Hunter's Waters of the Moon, which will probably be produced in NY next season, is an interesting play. Clurman, New Republic, describes it as a Chekhov and soda, a mild and decent brew, expertly served by a cast which includes Sybil Thorndyke, Edith Evans and Wendy Hiller. Watts, Post, thinks the London reviewers have underrated the play in lavishing praise on the stars. The play succeeds, where Hellman's The Autumn Garden fails, in making the story of a middle aged wealthy woman's effect on her environment dramatically effective.

The Little Hut, a farce by Nancy Mitford adapted from a French play by Andre Roussin, is the favorite play of visiting Americans in London, Watts discovered. Starring Robert Morley and Joan Tetzel, it is a sort of lunatic combination of "The Swiss Family Robinson" and "Design for Living." Seagulls to Sorrento, the all male play the British critics found superior to Mr. Roberts, is considered decidedly inferior by the Post critic. Nationalism, more than critical judgment, may be the reason, he admits.

' Legit Stuff '

Shows that closed include Flahooley...Danton Walker, Hy Gardner and Nick Kenny subbing for WMCA Barry Gray...Juanita Hall, South Pacific, may do Broadway column for Negro news syndicate...Ethel Colby, Journal of Commerce, featured on WOR-TV "Curtain Calls", Sundays at 10:45 PM...Morehouse, WT&S, reveals he turned down a ten week TV show because he must finish his book...Hawkins, WT&S, to vacation for month in England.